

Jurors see video of deputies confronting FBI agent

BY CINDY CHANG

A videotaped encounter between two Los Angeles County sheriff's sergeants and an FBI agent shows a surprisingly polite exchange, even as the agent was advised that she would soon be arrested.

The one-minute piece of videotape played in federal court Wednesday is central to the federal government's case against the two ser-

geants, Scott Craig and Maricela Long. They and four other sheriff's officials are on trial on charges of obstructing an investigation into brutality and corruption in Los Angeles County jails.

Last month, the trial of a seventh deputy on similar charges ended in a hung jury.

Craig testified Wednesday that sheriff's officials were building a criminal case against FBI Agent Leah Marx and her colleague for providing a cellphone to an

inmate informant at Men's Central Jail.

When he spoke to Marx at her house, Craig said, he was trying to tell her "where this was going, the seriousness of it."

The Los Angeles County district attorney's office declined to file charges against the federal agents, saying that it did not have jurisdiction over them.

Prosecutors allege that Craig and Long tried to intimidate Marx by falsely

claiming they were going to arrest her. The wide-ranging federal investigation resulted in criminal charges against 21 sheriff's officials, including the seven charged with obstruction of justice.

In the Sept. 26, 2011, videotape, Craig and Long approached Marx as she arrived home. Craig told her that she was "a named suspect in a felony complaint" and that sheriff's officials were in the "process of swearing out a declaration

for an arrest warrant for you."

Despite the subject matter, the conversation was cordial, concluding with a cheerful "Absolutely" and "OK, thanks."

Also on Wednesday, Assistant U.S. Atty. Lizabeth Rhodes played an expletive-laced audiotape of Craig criticizing the FBI's attempt to interview a corrupt deputy, Gilbert Michel, at Michel's home. In January 2012, Michel pleaded guilty to fed-

eral charges of smuggling a cellphone to the inmate informant in exchange for a bribe.

Craig testified that he was feigning outrage at the FBI as an interrogation technique to get Michel to warm up to him. But in cross-examination, Rhodes suggested that Craig's "disparaging" language encouraged Michel not to cooperate with the FBI.

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B

FOSTER FAILURE

Sat 6-21-14
Poor oversight of private firms has cost L.A. County

LA Times
BY GARRETT THEROLF

County auditors looking into one of Los Angeles' biggest foster care agencies in 2003 uncovered \$445,000 in ineligible or unsupported spending.

Auditors found \$234,000 in wages with no supporting documents to verify the hours worked, up to \$29,000 in unsupported vehicle expenses and \$47,000 that the agency paid to purchase one building and lease another

from its top executives, according to the audit report.

The county Department of Children and Family Services demanded that the private agency, Homes of Hope, return \$440,000.

Five years later, the county agreed to settle the matter for \$36,000, to be paid in installments without interest. Homes of Hope is still paying off the debt today — at \$600 per month.

"I can't explain it," said Philip Browning, who took over as director of Children

and Family Services two years ago. "I would have asked for more information before making the decision to give up on all that money."

Homes of Hope is emblematic of the decades-long failure to adequately monitor California's \$400-million-a-year private foster care industry.

The agency, which receives about \$3.6 million a year to care for neglected children, has become the focus of a renewed govern-

[See Foster, A12]

New focus on private foster care

LA Times
Sat 6-21-14

[Foster, from A1]
ment effort to impose strict-
er controls on private groups
that recruit and supervise
foster families.

Sukhwinder “Suki”
Singh, the agency’s founder
and executive director, said
in a brief interview: “We work
very, very hard to provide
care and supervision to our
children.” She declined to
comment further.

California began an ex-
periment nearly 27 years ago
that took a portion of foster
care away from county bu-
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the hands of private agen-
cies that legislators believed
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In Los Angeles County,
the 46 foster family charities
typically undergo financial
audits once a decade.

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“We have not done nearly
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tion survey had been used to
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sation was at “market level”
and sufficient to attract “the
highest-quality executive
talent.”

Privatized spending

Singh, of Homes of Hope,
opened her first foster care
agency in 1994 — then anoth-
er and another.

By 2009, Singh was work-
ing full time as chief execu-
tive of Homes of Hope in
West Covina and Interim
Care in Rancho Cucamonga.
She also worked a third full-
time job that year as board
president of Specialized
Care in Rancho Cucamonga,
according to the agencies’
tax returns.

Between 2008 and 2011,
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In their federal tax re-
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She also charged almost
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IRFAN KHAN Los Angeles Times

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peria house from Executive Director Sukhwinder “Suki” Singh for more than \$1,000 over the market rate.

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Rewriting rules

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Auditors found that one agency, Teens Happy Homes in Los Angeles, spent liberally on cigarettes and beer — 30 cases in one instance. At another Los Angeles County contractor, America Care, taxpayer dollars were spent on alcohol, clothing from Nordstrom, tobacco, jewelry boxes, fine china, perfume and a martini set, according to county auditors.

The two agencies, which are no longer caring for foster children, later reimbursed the county for some of the expenses but never reached an agreement on all the expenses flagged by auditors.

Salaries at some charities are high as well. Child-Net Youth & Family Services' former Chief Executive Robert DiStefano, for example, received a compensation package worth \$522,000 in 2010, according to the agency's tax returns.

The agency said in a statement that a compensa-

cording to financial statements filed with the state.

"On the face of it, this does not appear to be the best use of funds," said Armand Montiel, spokesman for the Department of Children and Family Services.

The privatization of foster care poured hundreds of millions of dollars into a system that had been dominated by government-run facilities. The private system now cares for over 80% of foster children placed with strangers in Los Angeles County.

The state pays the private agencies about \$2,000 per child each month. As much as 60% of that money can be retained by the agency to pay for rent, supplies and salaries for administrators and social workers, who make weekly visits to foster homes to ensure children are properly cared for.

The more children the charities place in homes, the more income.

Monitoring the finances

Questions about Homes of Hope's finances date to a county audit of the group's 2000-2001 expenditures.

Auditors identified \$445,000 in unsupported spending, including a \$28,750 full-time salary paid to a relative of Singh's who was employed elsewhere. The agency's lawyer told auditors that the relative worked nights and weekends at Homes of Hope.

In a rebuttal letter, Homes of Hope also said the supporting records for his hours and those of other employees were destroyed in an accidental fire. The agency declined the county's request to provide signed declarations with the employees' names, titles and typical hours.

Auditors also learned that Singh and her then-husband were landlords at three Homes of Hope locations. At one, the charity was charged for more space than it was using, resulting in more than \$14,000 in unal-

warded their findings to the Department of Children and Family Services, recommending that it get the money back.

After initial letters were sent to Homes of Hope, four years passed without any written communication, according to county files.

In 2009, six years after the audit, new fiscal workers took charge of the case and the county dropped its claims in return for a \$36,000 settlement without obtaining the requested documentation to support the expenditures detailed by auditors.

"From everything I've seen, I don't believe we handled this very well," Browning said.

Amid Homes of Hope's financial troubles, state and county officials cited the agency for varied deficiencies.

State regulators found that an adult male had been convicted of sexually abusing a foster child in her foster

mother was taken to the hospital and was placed on life support. Doctors believed the baby suffered from shaken baby syndrome, and the foster mother was later banned from foster care for life for the "non-accidental injury," according to state licensing records and county correspondence.

Homes of Hope was cited for poor screening that allowed the woman to become the foster parent of five children under the age of 5 when she was already running a day-care center.

In a written response, Singh said her social worker had properly monitored the home and the incident was unforeseen.

State auditors also examined the 2009 finances of San Bernardino County-based Interim Care, where Singh also served as executive director, and found weak fiscal controls and \$50,000 in spending that was disallowed.

Officials are working with state regulators to rewrite the rules on real estate transactions to ensure that contractors do not pay more than market value.

The officials said that new real estate contracts would have to be approved in advance, and existing contracts for inappropriately high levels of rent will be renegotiated.

Despite the focus on Homes of Hope, the county continues to fund Singh's group and send children there.

Officials say they can't afford to drop the agency because of the overload of foster children, whose numbers are increasing for the first time since the 1990s.

"We just don't have enough homes," Browning said.

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Times data editor Doug Smith contributed to this report.

children and teenagers who found their way into the system.

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Of more than \$11 million in inappropriate expenditures identified by auditors at foster care charities from 2000 to 2010, only about one-tenth has been recovered, county records show. And no effort has been made to get back millions more potentially owed the state, according to other county records and interviews.

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Between 2008 and 2011, 2,300 children lived in foster homes supervised by the agencies, according to state records.

In their federal tax returns for 2009, the agencies reported that Singh worked a total of 120 hours a week at the three nonprofit corporations, receiving \$311,000 in pay. In 2012 she collected \$195,000, working 80 hours a week at two agencies, according to tax returns.

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Rewriting rules

In Los Angeles County, Singh's case has sparked efforts to improve financial oversight of foster care agen-

Mon 6-23-14 County conflicts

JIM NEWTON

TWENTY YEARS AGO, in a closed court session convened to decide parental visitation issues for a young boy, a Los Angeles County social worker made a statement that startled even the judge. The social worker described a meeting on the boy's situation in which a question was raised about whether a county report gave sufficient weight to allegations that the boy had been molested. At that point, she said, county lawyers intervened to warn that changing the report could raise "concerns for liability against the department."

In this case, the social worker's supervisor changed the report despite the warning. But the notion that county attorneys would raise an issue of financial liability when a child's well-being was at stake disturbed the judge that day, according to a transcript of the session, and it continues to enrage the boy's mother.

The proceeding, like almost all such hearings at the time, was not public, and I can only report on it now because the

boy's mother last week provided me with that transcript. (At her request, I'm withholding the names of those involved, because of the sensitivity of the subject.) Her son is now grown, but the shattering experience shadows his mother's life even today, as does her lingering worry that the county might care more about protecting itself than it does about the best interests of children.

She's not alone in that concern. The question of county counsel's role in protecting children while also defending the county from liability remains at the center of a long quest to improve services for abused and neglected children in Los Angeles. The County Counsel's office wouldn't agree to talk to me about the issue, but as recently as April, a blue ribbon commission charged with looking at the county's foster care system included this observation in its report: "Protection of the county from perceived liability at times trumps protecting children."

In fact, members of the commission found that even their own work was at times impeded by county lawyers.

Liability worries should never take precedence over protecting children.

Citing attorney-client obligations, county counsel refused to provide requested case files to members of the commission. The commission described that as a "major roadblock" to its efforts.

That posture has grave implications for any attempt to improve child protection in Los Angeles County, where more than 36,000 children are receiving child welfare services and more than 20,000 have been taken from their homes and are living elsewhere. In essence, county counsel has often taken the position that any acknowledgment of failure or defects in the system opens the door for lawsuits, according to the commission. But without those acknowledgments, it's difficult to know what needs fixing or how to fix it.

David Estep, acting executive director of the Children's

Law Center of California, which represents children in foster care, emphasized that the vast majority of lawyers and social workers with the county do their jobs ethically and are committed to the well-being of children. But given that county counsel is simultaneously representing the county government, the Department of Children and Family Services and social workers, the situation is, he said, "rife with these potential conflicts."

It actually is better, in some ways, than it used to be. In the 1980s and early '90s, before the formation of the Children's Law Center, county counsel also represented the children in foster care. When conflicts arose between social workers and children, counsel was asked to drop one client. Usually, said Michael Nash, the presiding judge of Juvenile Court, county counsel would choose to keep the department and drop the child. "We've always had the question of where the loyalties of county counsel lie," Nash added.

Even when lawyers act correctly under these circumstances, it can leave lingering doubts. The commission, for instance, cannot know for certain what information was withheld from it, and the mother with whom I spoke cannot be sure that liability concerns did not affect her son's case. That's especially damaging because of the bewildering nature of dependency proceedings, where children can be suddenly stripped from their parents and cast into a complex and secretive system.

The system can, as I was reminded last week, leave lasting scars. As I spoke with the mother who brought me this information, she was mostly composed and meticulous. She came with highlighted files from the long history of her son's case, and she patiently guided me through them.

But as she described her sense of betrayal by social workers and government lawyers, her composure broke. There, two decades after her encounter with Los Angeles' foster care system, on a sunny morning, in the cheery eating area of a Whole Foods market, she began to cry.

Keeping tabs on the sheriff

Sun 6-29-14 LA Times
OVER THE NEXT two weeks, Los Angeles County supervisors have the opportunity to establish a system of oversight for the Sheriff's Department that will

finally bring some meaningful civilian accountability to a department long defined by abuse and mismanagement, as documented in a searing critique by the jail violence commission, federal civil rights charges against deputies, reports of inept hiring practices and perhaps a consent decree to correct inadequate mental health services for jail inmates.

The board started out on the right foot last year when it created the Office of Inspector General. It was designed to replace both a special counsel, who presented regular reports and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors but didn't get enough public attention to spark any follow-up, and the Office of Independent Review, which relied too much on the sheriff's voluntary cooperation to be a credible monitor.

But the supervisors rejected the strong recommendation of the Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence to appoint the inspector general to a set term and make him removable only for good cause. And the board still hasn't brokered an agreement with the Sheriff's Department over the scope of the inspector general's powers. So no matter how strong the work ethic and integrity of

Inspector General Max Huntsman, he is an at-will employee of the Board of Supervisors with no law establishing his power or authority to investigate the sheriff.

Meanwhile, the county's contracts with its previous monitors expire Monday, so for the first time in two decades there will be no independent sheriff oversight. Despite the opportunity and necessity for improvement, the county is in danger of falling backward.

Forward momentum will depend on more than new promises by the supervisors to do a better job of keeping an eye on the sheriff. It will require the board to create a citizens oversight commission that conducts its meetings in public and has the kind of insulation from micromanaging that so far the board has denied the inspector general. There should be nine members on the commission, enough for each county supervisor to appoint one while still allowing sufficient appointments by other authorities to prevent the commission from becoming the board's proxy. Members should serve for set, nonrenewable terms, and be removable only on a showing of good cause.

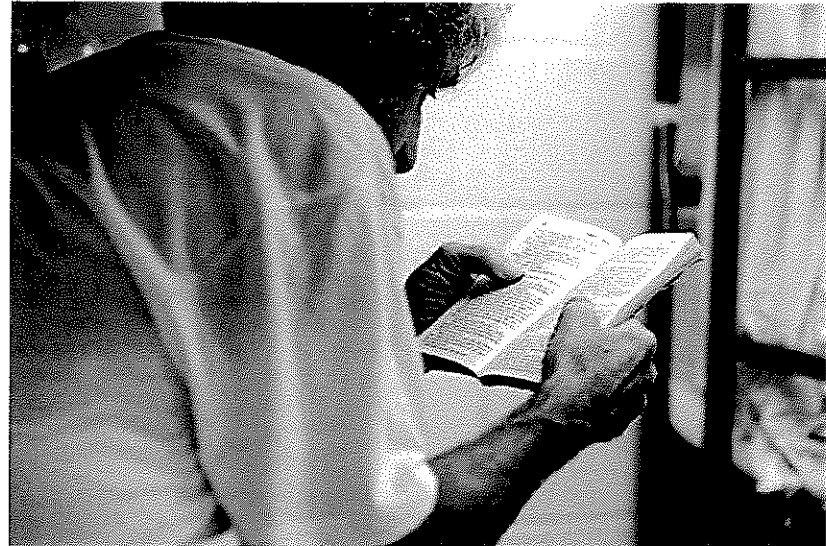
This is a transition year for the county, when the sheriff, two supervisors, the chief executive and the county counsel will step down. By creating a sheriff's oversight commission, the current board has the chance to leave the county with a better government, not just the same one with new faces.

An inmate on suicide watch, dressed in a gown, is lead back to his cell in the Twin Towers. The special gowns are made to prevent inmates from using them to harm themselves. With Los Angeles County facing the prospect of spending as much as \$1.7 billion -- and maybe even more -- to tear down and replace notorious Men's Central Jail, advocates for mentally ill inmates are asking the Board of Supervisors to consider so-called diversion programs to reduce costs and recidivism. Los Angeles, CA. 5/27/2014(Photo by John McCoy / Los Angeles Daily News)

By [Christina Villacorte](#), Los Angeles Daily News

Posted: 06/30/14, 9:14 PM PDT|Updated: 2 days ago

[0 Comments](#)



An inmate reads while sitting on his bunk in the Mens Central Jail. With Los Angeles County facing the prospect of spending as much as \$1.7 billion -- and maybe even more -- to tear down and replace notorious Men's Central Jail, advocates for mentally ill inmates are asking the Board of Supervisors to consider so-called diversion programs to reduce costs and recidivism. Los Angeles, CA. 5/27/2014(Photo by John McCoy / Los Angeles Daily News)

In another cell, an inmate who seemed to be hearing voices paced back and forth, muttering to himself. Still, he seemed better off than an inmate a few doors down whose cell had a sign that read “suicidal.”

The downtown Los Angeles lockup reeked of disinfectant but sheriff’s Lt. Mike Burse said that was “better than the alternative.” Pressed to explain, he said inmates often defecate on themselves.

Of the 19,000 men and women locked up in Los Angeles County’s jails, about 3,700 — or one out of every five — has been diagnosed with a mental illness. That’s more than enough to fill all the beds at County-USC Medical Center six times over.

A 2011 [report](#) commissioned by the county Board of Supervisors from the Vera Institute of Justice, a nonprofit think tank with a Los Angeles office, found the vast majority of the mentally ill in the county jail system were there because they were charged with drug possession, possibly because they “self-medicate,” and quality-of-life crimes like sleeping on the sidewalk.

“We’re locking up sick people and that, to me, seems unjust,” District Attorney Jackie Lacey said in an interview.

Seeking to improve the treatment of mentally ill inmates — and avoid getting sued over existing conditions — the board recently moved closer to approving a \$1.7-billion [proposal](#) to demolish Men’s Central Jail, across the street from Twin Towers near Union Station, and build a Consolidated Correctional Treatment Facility in its place.

Vanir Construction Management, which came up with the design, envisioned “a treatment facility for inmates instead of a jail providing healthcare.” It recommended 3,700 beds for inmates with mental illness and substance abuse disorders and 1,000 for inmates considered medically fragile or high-security. The annual operating cost was estimated at \$350 million a year — that’s on top of demolition and construction costs and interest payments.

Lacey balked at the expense, saying, “Would you like to pay more taxes? Because I think I’m all tapped out.” She urged the county to consider alternatives to incarceration, and convened a summit on diversion programs for the mentally ill.

“There are hardened criminals who give you reason to lock your doors at night, and then there are those with undiagnosed or untreated mental illness whose delusions and paranoia cause them to, say, resist arrest,” Lacey added. “I understand they need supervision but we have to find a way besides a felony conviction.”

Jails across the county started filling up with the mentally ill in 1955, when the social experiment called psychiatric deinstitutionalization prompted the closure of state-operated asylums over several decades.

American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California Legal Director Peter Eliasberg warned that putting people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression and other forms of mental illness behind bars for extended periods can exacerbate their condition.

“They tend to come out worse than when they came in,” he said, because of medication interruptions, post-traumatic stress from being locked up, and physical and/or sexual abuse from fellow inmates and even deputies.

Some inmates don’t come out alive. Last month, the U.S. Justice Department accused the county of continuing to “violate the constitutional rights of prisoners with mental illness,” noting 15 of them committed suicide over the last 30 months. Assistant Sheriff for Custody Terri McDonald and county Mental Health Director Marvin Southard agree jail should not be a “de facto mental hospital” and both are working to expand existing diversion programs, and add more.

“I think the team recognizes the need to do something different,” McDonald said, adding she is assembling a team that would help mentally ill inmates apply for benefits under the Affordable Care Act and Medi-Cal, so they can receive treatment at a community facility rather than jail.

Southard, meanwhile, is sending mental health professionals out on the field to accompany law enforcement officers responding to 9-1-1 calls about potentially crazy behavior. If they conclude someone is mentally ill, they can divert him or her to a community facility.

Recently, Southard secured state funding that would provide about 600 beds in community centers for mentally ill patients undergoing crisis, as well as additional urgent care facilities and triage workers. He is also trying to tap resources provided by the Affordable Care Act.

“I think that will be a game changer for all of us,” Southard said.

Diversion in other states

There are robust diversion programs across the country, and one of the most successful has been that of Miami/Dade County in Florida, developed by Judge Steven Leifman. “We actually closed one of our local jails last year because of the success of the program,” he said by phone. “That saved the county over \$12 million a year.”

Called the Criminal Mental Health Project, Miami/Dade County’s diversion program involves training police officers and 9-1-1 operators to spot the signs of mental illness, and providing access to medical treatment, rehab, housing, and other services for those accused of minor crimes. It has allowed 16,000 to 19,000 people to be diverted from jail every year, some of whom have been able to turn their lives around.

“One man with schizoaffective disorder and a crack addiction has now been clean and sober for six years, is married with a baby, and works for the court – it’s amazing,” Leifman said. “We’ve been at it for 14 years and we’re not aware of any horrible outcomes — we’ve had no one in the program go out and commit murder.”

The diversion program in Shelby County, Tennessee, is called the Jericho Project. Shelby County Public Defender Steven Bush, who founded the program, said it “improves safety for everybody, both for the community and the individual who’s placed on the road to recovery.”

He noted the recidivism rate — the rate of re-arrest — among the seriously mentally ill is about 80 percent. For Jericho Project’s that number is slashed in half.

Shelby County Assistant Public Defender Josh Spickler explained the project provides four months of intensive case management and “community linkages” for about 100 mentally ill people a year who are charged with minor crimes, and then keeps them on track with years of probation.

He acknowledged the difference in size between Shelby and Los Angeles counties’ jail populations but said, “I think the encouragement from a place like Shelby County would be: just start.”

“Absolutely the scale is daunting but carve out whatever you can,” he said. “The problem of undiagnosed and unmedicated and unsupported mental illness and addiction is not a criminal justice problem and yet, for so long, we’ve treated it as such.”

“Building a \$1.7-billion jail with mental health components is not the solution.”

About the Author

Jury finds six guilty of impeding jail probe

The deputies and supervisors face up to 15 years in prison for hindering FBI inquiry.

By VICTORIA KIM
AND CINDY CHANG

A jury Tuesday found six members of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department guilty of attempting to impede a federal civil rights inquiry into the county jails, providing prosecutors with a decisive victory as they continue to investigate higher-level officials tied to the scandal.

The case stems from a 2011 undercover operation in which the FBI used a jail inmate as an informant to investigate brutality and other misconduct by jail guards. Prosecutors charged that sheriff's officials discovered the inmate was working for the FBI and hid him from agents and the grand jury.

The two lieutenants, two

the trial that Tanaka and a current captain in the department, William "Tom" Carey, remain subjects in the ongoing grand jury investigation. Baca, who abruptly stepped down in January, has said federal officials told him he is not a target. Tanaka was forced out by Baca last year but is now running to succeed him as sheriff. Baca, Tanaka and Carey have denied any wrongdoing.

One juror interviewed after the verdict said he believed the defendants initially acted on marching orders from above, but eventually crossed the line into criminal conduct.

"At a certain point there are things you can't do," said the juror, a truck driver who

[See Deputies, A12]

WED 7-2-14

6 guilty of hindering probe

[Deputies, from A1]

lives in the Crenshaw district but would identify himself only as Ron.

The juror said he believed the defendants acted because they didn't want an outside law enforcement agency investigating deputy misconduct.

"I think once they found out somebody was in their department investigating, I don't think that's something you want anybody to do," he said. "You want to investigate yourself."

Tuesday's verdict came after a different jury deadlocked 6 to 6 in late May on whether to convict a seventh deputy of obstruction on similar facts in the first case to be tried arising from the federal grand jury investigation into abuses at the jails.

Legal experts said the win for prosecutors could give them more tools to widen the investigation and pursue higher-level officials.

"It gives them a lot of options, in terms of going up the ladder. You now have six people who have strong incentives to cooperate with the prosecutors," said Loyola Law School professor Laurie Levenson, a former federal prosecutor. "They have so much at stake. It might be time for let's make a deal."

Lt. Brian Moriguchi, president of the Los Angeles County Professional Peace Officers Assn., which represents supervisors in the Sheriff's Department, said he believed the blame should be directed higher in the organization.

"The frustration I feel is that all these individuals were following orders from higher-ups," he said. "The real people who are responsible haven't been held accountable."

U.S. Atty. Andre Birotte Jr., who is a nominee for the federal bench, said Tuesday that the civil rights investigation "exposed criminal conduct and a toxic culture within the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department."

"These defendants tarnished the badge by act-



VICTORIA KIM Los Angeles Times

JUROR NO. 1, a man named Ron, said defendants crossed the line into criminal conduct, noting: "At a certain point there are things you can't do."

law," he said in a prepared statement.

Interim Sheriff John Scott issued a statement to department personnel after the verdicts asking them not to let the case affect their work.

"The criminal justice system has spoken and as Sheriff, I respect the process and the verdict," he said. "I know that you will continue to recognize the importance of our law enforcement responsibilities."

The charges stemmed from a chaotic few weeks at the Men's Central Jail, less than a mile from the federal courthouse where the six stood trial. The conspiracy began, prosecutors said, with the discovery of a cellphone, wrapped in a glove and put inside a potato chip bag, found on inmate Anthony Brown.

Brown was acting as an informant for FBI agents investigating allegations of widespread violence by deputies against inmates. The agents smuggled a cellphone to Brown by bribing a corrupt deputy in an undercover sting to corroborate inmates' stories.

Defense attorneys contended that once the phone was discovered, it was a legitimate security concern for the department to investigate, and that the case was the result of a turf war between the Sheriff's Department and the FBI. Prosecu-

gation turned into a scheme to hide Brown from his handlers, prevent witnesses from cooperating with federal authorities and to keep the FBI out of its jails.

Lt. Gregory Thompson and Deputies Gerard Smith and Mickey Manzo each had a hand in moving Brown in the jails, first to a high-security floor with a camera, then to the infectious-disease wing, then to the San Dimas substation while re-booking him under false names — including Chris Johnson, a deputy's fantasy football pick.

The code name the department used for the plan to move Brown — "Operation Pandora's Box" — was telling, prosecutors repeatedly told jurors. It was, they argued, motivated by a desire to keep the department's evils from spilling out into the world. Defense attorneys had a different explanation — that Thompson, Smith and Manzo were working to protect Brown from the abusive deputies he was informing on, as Baca and Tanaka had ordered.

Lt. Stephen Leavins and Sgts. Maricela Long and Scott Craig were part of the department's Internal Criminal Investigations Bureau, which was investigating the cellphone and the corrupt deputy who smuggled it to Brown. The deputy, Gilbert Michel, pleaded guilty to bribery in 2012 and

sentence.

Prosecutors said statements made by the three in recorded interviews with witnesses, when they discouraged Brown, Michel and others from cooperating with the FBI, amounted to witness tampering. They also said Long and Craig committed crimes by going out to the lead FBI agent's home and threatening her with arrest, and by telling her that a warrant would be issued, knowing it wasn't true.

Long and Craig were also each convicted on a count of making false statements for lying to the agent and her supervisor, which carries a five-year maximum sentence.

Defense attorneys contended that Leavins, Long and Craig were conducting a legitimate investigation arising from the many allegations made by Brown, including charges that the FBI agents allowed drugs to be smuggled into the jails — which agents testified was untrue.

Miriam Krinsky, a former federal prosecutor who headed the Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence, said that even though the six on trial weren't accused of civil rights violations, testimony about the severity of brutality in the jails may have resonated with jurors.

"The government presented far more evidence of beatings and excessive force that were the backdrop for the FBI investigation, and explained why they went to the ends they did to investigate," she said.

Charges were brought against 13 other sheriff's deputies alleging excessive force against jail inmates and other crimes.

Thompson retired from the department in September. The remaining defendants were relieved of duty without pay in December, shortly before their indictments were announced. All six remain free on bail, and are scheduled to be sentenced Sept. 8.

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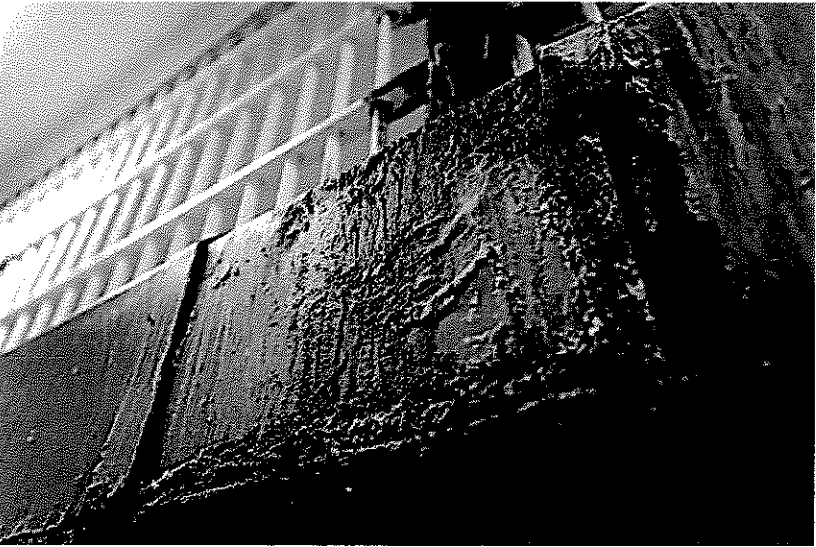


Trash bags hang outside cells at the Men’s Central Jail in Los Angeles, where capacity is about 4,000 higher than government regulations allow. L.A. County faces the prospect of spending as much as \$1.7 billion to tear down and replace the notorious downtown lockup. Photos by John McCoy —staff photographer

By [Christina Villacorte](#), Los Angeles Daily News

Posted: 06/21/14, 4:52 PM PDT|Updated: 1 week, 2 days ago

[7 Comments](#)



Leaking water feeds rust on bars inside an older wing of the Men’s Central Jail. The original jail dates to 1963,

Sheriff’s Capt. Daniel Dyer, commanding officer of the downtown Men’s Central Jail, couldn’t help but grimace during a recent inspection of Dorm 9500.

More than 200 low-security inmates were crammed inside the room, every now and then tripping over each other’s bunks spaced a foot apart.

The space was not originally intended to serve as living quarters, so toilets were an afterthought, installed haphazardly in the middle of a row of bunks in the 1980s. They’re exposed to the room with no stall walls and only a few feet from the nearest bunk.

“That’s just wrong,” Dyer said, gesturing toward the inmates who have to eat and sleep next to the toilets.

Down the corridor, drug offender Timothy Lyles complained loudly about being “warehoused” with about 100 medium-risk inmates in Dorm 9600. “Spiritually, emotionally and mentally, this will destroy you,” he ranted.

“Attitudes are jumping off,” observed Juan Hernandez, another drug offender.

“You gotta watch your step,” he added. “Learn to say ‘excuse me’ real quick if you bump into somebody, so there won’t be any problems.”

Andy Gurule, a drug offender as well, literally kept himself above the fray by staying on one of the triple bunks. His bed was sandwiched between inmates above and beneath him, as well as tight on either side.

“It’s a little cramped,” Gurule said ruefully, and added he would rather go back to being homeless than stay in MCJ.

And this isn’t even the worst that Men’s Central Jail has ever been. That was back two decades ago, when the jail was so packed that inmates were forced to sleep on the roof.

In recent years, scandals put a spotlight on the violence in the Los Angeles County jail system, but overcrowding is once again also a concern, along with failing infrastructure.

“We are at serious risk of litigation,” Assistant Sheriff Terri McDonald warned. “If the courts take over, we’ll end up spending a lot of money which could have gone toward rehabilitation and treatment.”

County Assistant Chief Executive Officer Ryan Alsop said Gov. Jerry Brown’s 2011 decision to ease overcrowding in state prisons by diverting inmates to county jails created a crisis.

“As a result of AB 109, Los Angeles County is now operating the population equivalent of two to three state prisons without the necessary infrastructure or adequate resources to do so,” he said. “Something must be done.”

Alsop called for additional funding support to ensure inmates’ “appropriate and effective supervision and rehabilitation.”

MCJ, whose original wing was completed in 1963, is slated for the wrecking ball, but not for a while. Last month, the county Board of Supervisors requested environmental studies on a \$1.7 billion proposal to demolish and replace it with a modern corrections facility.

While Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky winced at the price tag, calling it “the most expensive in the history of the county, without a doubt, not even close,” Dyer said upgrades are urgently needed because “everything is falling apart.”

“We have pipes whose tops have rotted away so you can see the sewage running through,” Dyer said. “Last summer, the air-conditioning system went down and we had to rent two trucks from Arizona to pump cool air into the medical wing — that was a two-month project.”

“When gates and other stuff break down,” he added, “half the battle is finding replacement parts because a lot of the businesses that made them don’t exist anymore.”

Convicted sex offenders are segregated from the rest of the population for their own safety but their cells have among the worst damage, with bars covered in corrosive rust, and water seeping through the walls and onto the floors.

“You know a lawsuit is coming,” District Attorney Jackie Lacey warned, noting some of the conditions are similar to what prompted the U.S. Supreme Court to declare the overcrowding at state prisons unconstitutional. “We’re next,” she said.

Inmates all over the place

The jail population peaked at about 23,000 in the late ’80s and early ’90s. Sheriff’s Lt. Sergio Murillo recalled, “We used to have inmates all over the place — they were on the roof, in the chapel, on the floors of the cells.”

The number dropped to about 15,000 three years ago, but AB 109 pushed it up to 19,000 currently. That’s 4,000 more than government regulations allow.

“That’s horrific, horrendous and unacceptable,” said Peter Eliasberg, legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, a court-appointed monitor of the jails.

“It raises very significant questions as to whether this is an unconstitutional level of overcrowding, especially when they have space they are not utilizing,” he added.

Dyer admitted the East Facility at Pitchess Detention Center in Castaic has room for 1,500 inmates but isn’t being used because of budget problems.

To ease the overcrowding, the jails have an early release program. According to McDonald, female inmates often serve as little as 10 percent, and male inmates between 20 and 100 percent, of the time ordered by a judge or jury, because of lack of space to hold them.

This includes even some serious offenders, which worries activist Luz Ruiz, whose son Bobby was shot dead by suspected gang members crashing a party in West Covina in 2005.

“Imagine you have a loved one and he’s murdered, and the person that did it is supposed to be behind bars for the rest of his life, but then all of a sudden you find out he’s walking free,” said Ruiz, now the San Fernando Valley chapter leader for the nonprofit group Family and Friends of Murder Victims.

“You’d feel like the tragedy is happening all over again — not having justice,” she said.

Eliasberg, however, noted many of those in jail have not been convicted of any crimes but simply cannot afford to post bail, which can cost thousands of dollars.

“Phil Spector was out on bail, even though he was charged with murder,” Eliasberg said. “Did the fact that he posted a \$1 million bond make him less of a risk? Not really.”

He argued for risk-based — as opposed to bail-based — pretrial release, as well as for an increase in split-sentences, which would allow inmates to serve part of their time in a rehab or mental health treatment facility, instead of jail.

Report: Latinos overrepresented as crime victims and in justice system

By Brenda Gazzar, Los Angeles Daily News
Tuesday, June 24, 2014

DailyNews.com

LA Daily News (<http://www.dailynews.com>)

Report: Latinos overrepresented as crime victims and in justice system

Existing research on Latino victimization rates and their treatment in the California criminal justice system paints "a troubling picture of cumulative disadvantage" for community members and their safety, according to an advocacy group's report.

Latinos, today the largest ethnic group in the state, are significantly overrepresented not only in the state's courts, jails and prisons but also as victims of crime, according to "Latino Voices: The Impacts of Crime and Criminal Justice Policies on Latinos" released Tuesday by Californians for Safety and Justice.

"What we know based on this report is that Latinos have been disserved by current criminal justice practices," Lenore Anderson, the nonprofit organization's executive director, said before a public forum at the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. "Unless and until we start to incorporate the experiences of the Latino community in our policy priorities, we'll continue to see both overincarceration rates as well as probably disproportionate rates of victimization."

Californians for Safety and Justice, an advocacy organization that aims to increase public safety and reduce waste in the state's criminal justice system, commissioned Roberto Suro, director of USC's Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, to compile and analyze much of the report's data. The limited research that exists indicates that three decades of a failed system has particularly harmed Latino communities, Suro said.

Among the findings cited are that Latinos were murdered in California in 2011 at twice the rate of whites (5.1 per 100,000 compared to 2.4) and the rate was even higher for Latinos under the age of 30 (6.1), according to the California Attorney General's Office. Firearms were the cause of Latino murders nearly 73 percent of the time that year versus 54 percent of the time for whites. And murdered Latinos were more likely to have been killed by strangers than were whites (40.5 percent vs. 26 percent), according to the Attorney General's Office.

Latinos have also reported being more likely to experience multiple crimes.

"In looking at all these results, I don't think you have to find systemic racism or adopt a position of victimization to find that Latinos suffer disproportionately," Suro said. "I don't think you have to say Latinos were blameless — they weren't — to say they were ill-served and disproportionately ill-served and that their communities suffered disproportionately as a result of these policies."

A 2011 federal report found that Latinos, more than any other ethnic group, were convicted of offenses receiving mandatory sentences, or those with required penalties. Latinos have also faced unequal treatment while awaiting trial in the justice system regardless of guilt, Suro said. A 2005 analysis of felony defendants in urban courts found that Latinos were less likely to be released on their own recognizance, more likely to be denied bail, and issued significantly higher amounts than African-Americans or whites under similar circumstances, according to a Justice Quarterly article.

Those who are in jail while awaiting trial can end up copping pleas in order to get out or have difficulty amounting a defense because of limited access to attorneys, witnesses and their community, Suro said.

"It ends up being a pipeline to incarceration that begins at the police station in the moments after arrest," he said. "One in which Latinos are particularly vulnerable by virtue of language, income, lack of knowledge of the system."

While the consequences were severe and disproportionate for Latinos, the results for African-Americans were even worse by many measures, Suro noted.

The report argued that there is a significant need for more intentional data collection of Latino populations. The justice system should provide culturally competent and Spanish-language services to meet the community's needs and improve support and services for Latino survivors of crime. Underlying health problems such as drug, alcohol or mental health issues, which can contribute to criminal activity, also need to be addressed, the report stated.

"What we see in the Latino community is limited access to mental health treatment and drug-based programs," Anderson said. "Latinos have lower health insurance rates than other Californians. Investing in health solutions that address those drivers (of crime) would be specifically beneficial to the Latino community."

URL: <http://www.dailynews.com/general-news/20140624/report-latinos-overrepresented-as-crime-victims-and-in-justice-system>

commentary WED 6-25-14 Daily Breeze

A mental health jail? That's an oxymoron

By Pattisse Cullors-Brignac
and Diana Zuniga

Jails create and exacerbate mental health problems.

It does not take a genius to conclude, and yet, countless studies have been proven it: If you remove someone from their daily life, their support system, their work, their sense of meaning and community, and put them into an extremely controlled and violent environment that is meant to punish them and take away their dignity, they will suffer physically, emotionally and mentally. This is even truer for the large number of people who enter jail already suffering from mental illness.

And yet, last month the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors endorsed a plan to expand the most notorious jail system and the largest de facto mental health facility in the world by building a "mental health jail" and a women's jail. They will cost the county \$2.3 billion to construct and \$456 million a year to operate, with debt service payments guaranteed to at least double the cost.

At the same meeting, Supervisor Mark-Ridley Thomas, pro-posal to offer diversion from jail for certain people suffering from mental illness passed unanimously. But if the supervisors plan to take this proposal seriously, why would they build a costly mental health jail? In response, the Vera Institute

made it clear that to save money and lives, the county must prioritize keeping "people who come into contact with law enforcement because of mental illness, intoxication, or homelessness from becoming unnecessarily entangled in the criminal justice system."

Last month Dr. Marvin Southard, the director of the Department of Mental Health, stated that the traumas of arrest and incarceration were among the leading causes of rising mental illness. He voiced concern about the lack of community programs that leaves jail as the default option for those to whom treatment is unavailable. District Attorney Jackie Lacey stated, "the use of jails as a surrogate mental health ward has resulted in extremely high costs. The current system is, simply put, unjust." Lacey talked about Miami-Dade County pre-bookings and post-booking diversion programs for people with mental illness that could reduce the number of people in L.A. jails by 2,000 if applied here.

James Austin recommended implementing a pretrial release program and expanded use of split sentencing at 35 percent (not our current 5 percent), which would reduce the jail population by 3,000.

These policy options and others have been proven effective and could reduce the entire "need" for new jail cells.

Let's not kid ourselves: The sheriff is not and cannot be a pro-

vider of primary mental health care and treatment. While the Sheriff's Department must vastly improve the ways it deals with the mentally ill in jails, no new facility and no new management is going to make them therapists. With \$2 billion, L.A. could construct 2,152 single-parent family apartments, 1,792 transitional apartments for the homeless, 280 youth centers, 60 vocational centers, or 240 assisted living facilities for the mentally ill.

Given all the lobbying L.A. County has been doing in Sacramento for more jail money, we suspect they won't take these alternatives seriously. They are certainly not encouraged by a state Legislature that just approved \$500 million in new jail construction money.

We don't need more jail cells. We need representatives willing to protect our most vulnerable populations from a future where going to jail is a prerequisite for getting access to mental health, drug treatment and social programs. The way out of this shameful situation is not new jails with "therapeutic" mission statements. It is true diversion of the mentally ill from jail.

Pattisse Cullors-Brignac is the executive director and founder of Dignity and Power Now and Coalition to End Sheriff Violence. Diana Zuniga is the statewide organizer for Californians United for a Responsible Budget.

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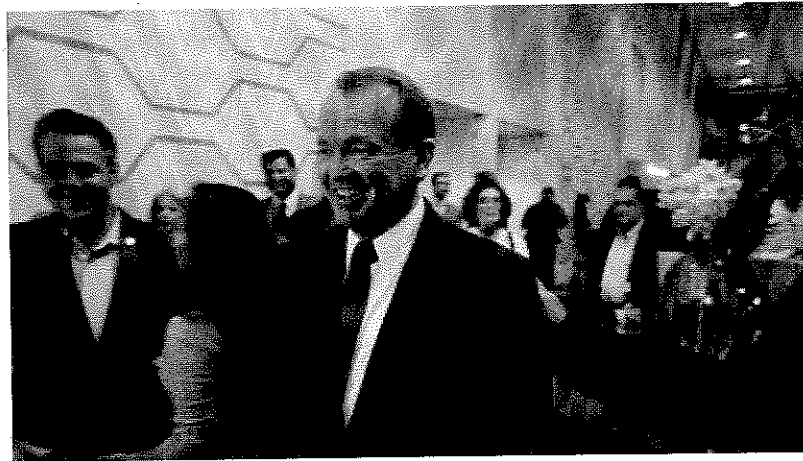
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L.A. Now

California: This just in

It's final: McDonnell to face Tanaka in runoff for L.A. County sheriff



Long Beach Police Chief Jim McDonnell is in a runoff against former undersheriff Paul Tanaka to lead the L.A. County Sheriff's Department. (Michael Robinson Chavez / Los Angeles Times)

By CINDY CHANG

JUNE 30, 2014, 4:29 PM

With final election results certified on Monday, Jim McDonnell's margin of victory in the Los Angeles County sheriff's race fell just short of 50%, putting him in a Nov. 4 runoff against former undersheriff Paul Tanaka.

As nearly 153,000 remaining absentee and provisional ballots were counted following the June 3 primary, McDonnell's percentage inched up, but the final tally had him about 4,450 votes short of an outright win.

McDonnell, who is chief of police in Long Beach, got over 49% of the vote, compared with 15% for Tanaka, in a field of seven candidates.

Four of the five losing candidates have endorsed McDonnell, who also gained key law enforcement endorsements, including both sheriff's department unions, the LAPD union and the Long Beach police union, in the days following the primary.

McDonnell and Tanaka are running to replace longtime Sheriff Lee Baca, who abruptly retired in January after scandals involving questionable hiring practices and alleged brutality in the jails.

If McDonnell wins, he will be the first sheriff in a century to be elected from outside the department.

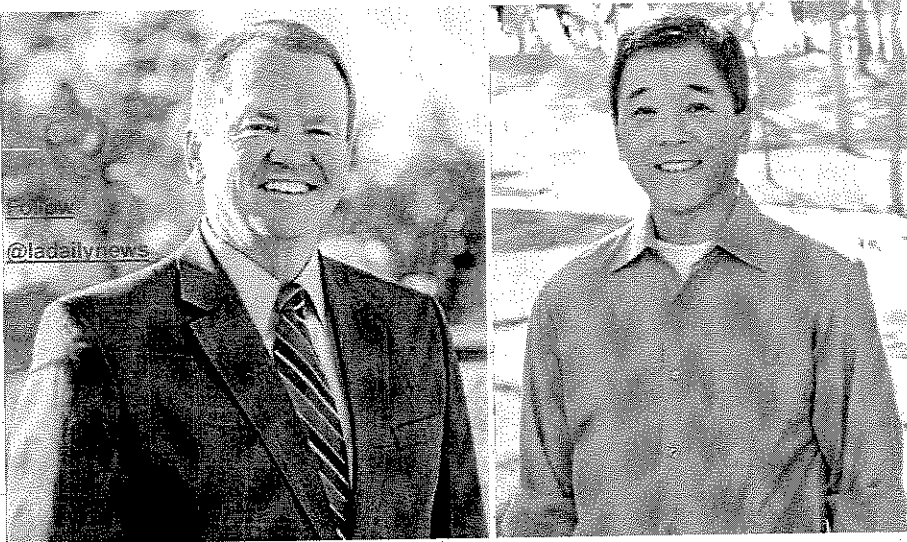
Turnout in November is expected to be higher than the 17% of county voters who cast ballots in the primary. Steve Barkan, a McDonnell campaign consultant, said his client is in an "extremely strong position."

"The chief doesn't take anything for granted. He's going to run a strong campaign," Barkan said.

Tanaka could not be reached for comment.

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After the June 3 primary, Long Beach Police Chief Jim McDonnell, left, and former Undersheriff Paul Tanaka, will face off on Nov. 4, 2014, to be the next Los Angeles County Sheriff.

By [Thomas Himes](#), Los Angeles Daily News

Posted: 06/25/14, 8:07 PM PDT

[1 Comment](#)

Final vote tallies released Wednesday indicate the race for Los Angeles County sheriff will head to a general election runoff between Long Beach Police Chief Jim McDonnell and Gardena Mayor Paul Tanaka.

McDonnell — the overwhelming victor in the June 3 primary election — finished just 0.65 percent short of the 50 percent plus 1 mark needed to skip the Nov. 3 election and be sworn in as head of the nation's largest sheriff's department.

Tanaka claimed 15.09 percent of votes to beat out third-place finisher Bob Olmsted and stay in the hunt. The department's former second-in-command built the race's largest campaign coffer, collecting more than \$900,000 in contributions. McDonnell raised more than \$760,000.

With thousands of ballots uncounted on election night, the ultimate outcome was not certain until the final count was released Wednesday.

At times, as the vote count proceeded, McDonnell seemed to be close to an outright victory, climbing to 49.73 percent in a June 10 count, but as election officials continued to log mail-in ballots that were received on election day or handed in at the polls, he dropped slightly.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors will certify results July 1.

About the Author

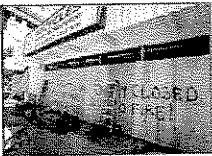
Reach the author at thomas.himes@langnews.com or follow Thomas on Twitter: [@LADailyThomas](#).

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L.A. COUNTY JAILS: EXCLUSIVE REPORT



PHOTOS BY JOHN MCCOY — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

An inmate on suicide watch, dressed in a gown, is led back to his cell in the Twin Towers. The special gowns are made to prevent inmates from using them to harm themselves.

MENTALLY ILL LOCKED UP. WHY?

Solution: Some say diversion is better, cheaper alternative

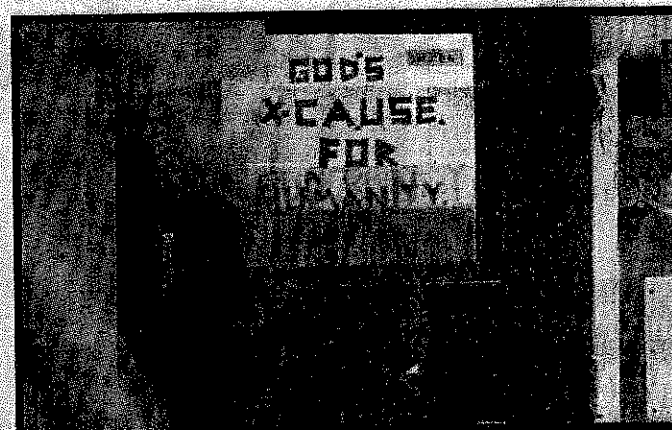
By Christina Villacorte
christina.villacorte@langnews.com
@LADNvillacorte on Twitter

One of the high-observation cells at the Twin Towers Correctional Facility was covered in gibberish — an inmate tormented by mental illness had torn up the brown bag that contained his lunch, fashioned strips of paper into letters, and then stuck them onto the walls, possibly with his saliva.

In another cell, an inmate who seemed to be hearing voices paced back and forth, muttering to himself. Still, he seemed better off than an inmate a few doors down whose cell had a sign that read “suicidal.”

The downtown Los Angeles lockup reeked of disinfectant but sheriff's Lt.

JAILS » PAGE 9



An inmate on suicide watch at Twin Towers peers out from his cell. Advocates for mentally ill inmates are asking the Board of Supervisors to consider so-called diversion programs to reduce costs and recidivism.

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THE SERIES

Part two of an occasional series on the state of Los Angeles County jails and plans to address conditions.

**“We’re locking
up sick people
and that, to me,
seems unjust.”**

— District Attorney Jackie Lacey

Jails

FROM PAGE 1

Mike Burse said that was “better than the alternative.” Pressed to explain, he said inmates often defecate on themselves.

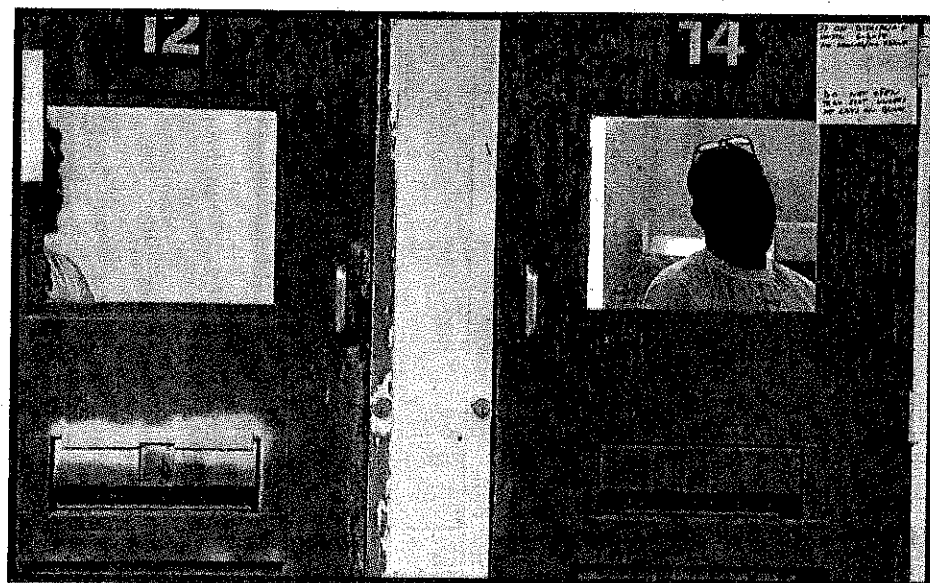
Of the 19,000 men and women locked up in Los Angeles County’s jails, about 3,700 — or one out of every five — has been diagnosed with a mental illness. That’s more than enough to fill all the beds at County-USC Medical Center six times over.

A 2011 report commissioned by the county Board of Supervisors from the Vera Institute of Justice, a nonprofit think tank with a Los Angeles office, found the vast majority of the mentally ill in the county jail system were there because they were charged with drug possession, possibly because they “self-medicate,” and quality-of-life crimes like sleeping on the sidewalk.

“We’re locking up sick people and that, to me, seems unjust,” District Attorney Jackie Lacey said in an interview.

Seeking to improve the treatment of mentally ill inmates — and avoid getting sued over existing conditions — the board recently moved closer to approving a \$1.7-billion proposal to demolish Men’s Central Jail, across the street from Twin Towers near Union Station, and build a Consolidated Correctional Treatment Facility in its place.

Vanir Construction Management, which came up with the design, envisioned “a treatment facility for inmates instead of a jail providing healthcare.” It was



JOHN MCCOY — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Inmates on suicide watch at Twin Towers look out their cell windows so they can see a television at Men’s Central Jail (faces have been slightly darkened to conceal the identity of the inmates). Some say there should be better options than cells for the mentally ill.

ommended 3,700 beds for inmates with mental illness and substance abuse disorders and 1,000 for inmates considered medically fragile or high-security. The annual operating cost was estimated at \$350 million a year — that’s on top of demolition and construction costs and interest payments.

Lacey balked at the expense, saying, “Would you like to pay more taxes? Because I think I’m all tapped out.” She urged the county to consider alternatives to incarceration, and convened a summit on diversion programs for the mentally ill.

“There are hardened criminals who give you reason to lock your doors at night, and then there are those with undiagnosed or untreated mental illness whose delusions and paranoia cause them to, say, resist arrest,” Lacey added. “I

pervision but we have to find a way besides a felony conviction.”

Jails across the county started filling up with the mentally ill in 1955, when the social experiment called psychiatric deinstitutionalization prompted the closure of state-operated asylums over several decades.

American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California Legal Director Peter Eliasberg warned that putting people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression and other forms of mental illness behind bars for extended periods can exacerbate their condition.

“They tend to come out worse than when they came in,” he said, because of medication interruptions, post-traumatic stress from being locked up, and physical and/or sexual abuse from fellow inmates and even deputies.

out alive. Last month, the U.S. Justice Department accused the county of continuing to “violate the constitutional rights of prisoners with mental illness,” noting 15 of them committed suicide over the past 30 months. Assistant Sheriff for Custody Terri McDonald and county Mental Health Director Marvin Southard agree jail should not be a “de facto mental hospital” and both are working to expand existing diversion programs, and add more.

“I think the team recognizes the need to do something different,” McDonald said, adding she is assembling a team that would help mentally ill inmates apply for benefits under the Affordable Care Act and Medi-Cal, so they can receive treatment at a community facility rather than jail.

Southard, meanwhile, is sending mental health pro-

to accompany law enforcement officers responding to 9-1-1 calls about potentially crazy behavior. If they conclude someone is mentally ill, they can divert him or her to a community facility.

Recently, Southard secured state funding that would provide about 600 beds in community centers for mentally ill patients undergoing crisis, as well as additional urgent care facilities and triage workers. He is also trying to tap resources provided by the Affordable Care Act.

“I think that will be a game changer for all of us,” Southard said.

Diversion in other states

There are robust diversion programs across the country, and one of the most successful has been that of Miami/Dade County in Florida, developed by Judge Steven Leifman. “We actually closed one of our local jails last year because of the success of the program,” he said by phone. “That saved the county over \$12 million a year.”

Called the Criminal Mental Health Project, Miami/Dade County’s diversion program involves training police officers and 9-1-1 operators to spot the signs of mental illness, and providing access to medical treatment, rehab, housing, and other services for those accused of minor crimes. It has allowed 16,000 to 19,000 people to be diverted from jail every year, some of whom have been able to turn their lives around.

“One man with schizoaffective disorder and a crack addiction had been

six years, is married with a baby, and works for the court — it’s amazing,” Leifman said. “We’ve been at it for 14 years and we’re not aware of any horrible outcomes — we’ve had no one in the program go out and commit murder.”

The diversion program in Shelby County, Tenn., is called the Jericho Project. Memphis Public Defender Steven Bush, who founded the program, said it “improves safety for everybody, both for the community and the individual who’s placed on the road to recovery.”

He noted the recidivism rate — the rate of re-arrest — among the seriously mentally ill is about 80 percent. For Jericho Project’s that number is slashed in half.

Memphis Assistant Public Defender Josh Spickler explained the project provides four months of intensive case management and “community linkages” for mentally ill people who are charged with minor crimes, and then keeps them on track with years of probation.

He acknowledged the difference in size between Shelby and Los Angeles counties’ jail populations but said, “I think the encouragement from a place like Shelby County would be: just start.”

“Absolutely the scale is daunting but carve out whatever you can,” he said. “The problem of undiagnosed and unmedicated and unsupported mental illness and addiction is not a criminal justice problem and yet, for so long, we’ve treated it as such,” he said.

“Building a \$1.7 billion jail with mental health

Comments

LOS ANGELES >> Six members of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department were convicted Tuesday of obstructing a federal probe into violence against inmates in county jails.

After a week of deliberations, a federal court jury in downtown Los Angeles convicted Lts. Stephen Leavins, 52, and Gregory Thompson, 54; Sgts. Scott Craig, 50, and Maricela Long, 46; and Deputies Gerard Smith, 42, and Mickey Manzo, 34, of conspiracy and obstruction of justice. Those charges together carry a potential maximum sentence of 15 years in prison.

Craig and Long were also convicted of a count of making false statements for telling an FBI agent involved in the jails probe that she was under investigation and could face arrest. That charge carries a possible prison sentence of up to five years.

Sentencing is set for Sept. 8.

The attorneys and defendants had no immediate comment after the verdicts were read. But U.S. Attorney Andre Birotte Jr. said later the defendants "participated in a scheme to thwart a federal grand jury investigation into violations of basic constitutional rights guaranteed to both prisoners and visitors to county jails."

"While an overwhelming majority of law enforcement officials serve with honor and dignity, these defendants tarnished the badge by acting on the false belief that they were above the law," he said.

Prosecutors said the defendants conspired to transfer and rebook a federal informant in the jail to hide him from his FBI handlers when agents wanted to put him in front of a grand jury to testify about allegations of excessive force against inmates. The informant, Anthony Brown, was repeatedly moved within the jail system and even booked under phony names, prosecutors said.

Defense attorneys countered that the defendants were simply following orders from superiors.

One of the jurors, who gave his name only as Ron from Los Angeles, said the verdict was a difficult one to reach without letting emotions dictate the outcome of the case.

"It was a hard decision," he said. "You see someone with these great careers, and poof, they're gone."

Asked about the contention that the defendants' actions were merely in response to orders, he said, "It went over the line."

"I'm not here to knock the sheriff's department," he said. "I've got great respect for them."

He added, however, that the defendants' superiors "could have stopped it."

The six defendants schemed to "silence the witness," Assistant U.S. Attorney Maggie Carter told the jury during her closing argument. "Even if this was standard operating procedure, this was a federal investigation and they had the intent to commit obstruction of justice."

Defense attorneys countered that their clients were merely following orders from then-Sheriff Lee Baca when Brown was moved to various cells within the Men's Central Jail downtown, then to a Temple City sheriff's station, and finally to a San Dimas substation, where he was kept under 24-hour guard, during August and September 2011.

"There's no evidence that Lee Baca could not be trusted," David Stothers, who represents Thompson, said in his closing argument. "Those orders came down the chain, and my client complied with them."

Carter told the panel that Brown was not transferred back to the Men's Central Jail until he had told his jailers that he had decided against cooperating with the federal investigation.

"Law enforcement at all levels must work together to arrive at justice and to safeguard the civil rights of all the people we serve," according to Bill Lewis, assistant director in charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office.

Brown became an issue for the department when an FBI cell phone was found in his possession on Aug. 8, 2011, and sheriff's officials realized that the inmate was cooperating in a federal probe they previously knew nothing about.

The phone was smuggled into the jail by a deputy in exchange for cash provided by the FBI. The deputy eventually pleaded guilty to federal charges and is awaiting sentencing.

When Craig and Long determined who at the FBI's Los Angeles office was in charge of the cell phone operation, they embarked on a plan to frighten the agent and discover the extent of the jail's investigation, Carter said.

The sergeants — who worked for Leavins — confronted the agent in front of her home, telling her they were planning to arrest her for her involvement in the smuggled cell phone, according to prosecutors, who played a sheriff's surveillance videotape of the encounter for the jury.

Trial for a seventh defendant, deputy James Sexton, ended last month in a mistrial with the jury evenly split and hopelessly deadlocked. The allegations in the current case were the same as those in the Sexton proceedings.

The case stems from July 2010, when the FBI began looking into alleged civil rights abuses committed by members of the sheriff's department within Los Angeles county jails. As part of the investigation, the FBI interviewed prisoners, including Brown, who had been convicted and was awaiting transfer to state prison to serve a life term.

Prisoners had reported significant levels of civil rights abuses, but federal investigators had no way of verifying the reports because they had no access to either deputies or sheriff's department documents, Assistant U.S. Attorney Lizabeth Rhodes.

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